

MANZANAR

FRONT END EVALUATION

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

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INTRODUCTION

Front-end evaluation is increasingly recognized as an important tool in the development of exhibitions of all types. The reason is very clear - knowing early in the design process what the potential (target) audience likes, dislikes, is interested in, knows (and does not know) about the subject matter of the planned exhibition helps to inform decisions related to both the content and the "style" of that exhibition. Along with formative and summative/remedial evaluations, these methodologies provide the exhibit planner/developer with a wealth of information that can help insure that the "finished product" will meet its intended objectives in a visitor-friendly way.

The subject matter of the exhibition being planned for installation at the Manzanar site is an excellent example of why it is important to get critical information from potential visitors before final decisions are made about what the exhibit should contain and how it should tell its story. The internment event itself occurred almost 50 years ago, which makes it "ancient history" to a very large segment of the population. It is also a subject that is given relatively little (and most often NO) attention in the curriculum of most US schools. And yet, it is an event that has profound implications for our understanding of our social and constitutional history. Of course, to that relatively small but significant group of Japanese Americans that had first-hand experience with internment, it is also a very personal and often tragic part of their lives. In short, it is a complex story that has an important message to convey to all those who will visit the site, including the informed, the semi-informed, and the un-informed.

For these reasons, Focus Groups were conducted with groups representing a wide range of ages, knowledge, interest, and background, including High School students, museum visiting adults, Japanese Americans who were sent to and spent time in one of the camps, and Japanese American community leaders who have been instrumental in keeping the internment story in the public consciousness.

Separate protocols were developed for each group and used to guide the discussion. Each session lasted approximately one hour and was attended only by the discussion group leader and participants. The student sessions were carried out at a local Los Angeles High School. The other sessions were carried out at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, CA. *(The cooperation of those in each of these institutions who were instrumental in arranging for and supporting this work is gratefully acknowledged.)*

Except where quotes are used, the comments of the participants are generally not reported verbatim. However, the essential meaning of what was said was carefully noted and fully reported. Paragraph breaks indicate a new "voice" was being heard. None of the comments made by any of the participants were omitted, even when they were repetitious or seemed tangential to the subject under discussion. This is in keeping with the notion that the importance and usefulness of what is said should be judged by all those who have a role to play in the exhibit planning and development process. What may be considered trivial or inconsequential by one person may be seen as an important insight by another.

The final section of this report contains an overview of the findings with an emphasis on those that appear to have implications for the design and content of the completed exhibition.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Former Internees

This important group consisted (with one exception) of persons who actually had extended experience living in a camp. Of the 11 who comprised this group, 4 were interned at Heart Mt., 4 at Manzanar, one at Poston and one at Tule Lake. One person was not herself an internee but spent time visiting her parents who were interned at Heart Mt. Several of these participants are also members of the Manzanar Advisory Committee. Also, one person made special note of the fact that he was quite young (4/5 years old) when he was living in the camp and therefore has a very special, childhood memory of this experience ("It was lots of fun for me but not for my parents.").

The fact that men in the camp volunteered for the military and formed one of the most decorated units in the US Army in WWII was very significant and should be given special attention in the exhibit. The patriotic side of those living in the camps needs to be pointed out.

This comment led to a discussion of the role of resistance in the whole internment process. The lack of any strong, organized opposition from the Japanese community was said to be a function of the times. It may have been characteristic of the '60s to "lay down in front of a bus," "be attacked by dogs", or to "march in the streets," but not in the '40s. The Japanese people had an image of being peace-loving and law abiding, which was instilled in them by their parents. The notion of civil disobedience "was not in their vocabulary". This is still true today. "It is generational."

The exhibit has to set the stage for the attitudes toward the Japanese that existed in those days in the larger community. There was deep prejudice against them that fueled the whole internment experience. Also economic pressure.

It was noted that this kind of negative feeling toward minority groups is still going on, as in the case of the Chinese (perhaps a reference to the Dr. Lee case). The citizenship issue is still with us in terms of migrants and others..

Those who gave their lives in the military should have an honored place in the exhibit. (Congressional Medal of Honor winner was mentioned as deserving a special place. A highway in CA was named for him. "Tying that in with Manzanar would be very good.")

To the question about the extent to which the exhibition should be "Manzanar" vs. all of the camps, it was noted that the enabling legislation passed by congress requires that all the camps be represented. It could be done in the overall chronology in which all of the 10 camps would be represented.

The biggest issue in this whole thing has to do with the constitution of the US. This has reference to all Americans then and now.

An exception was taken to the earlier comment about resistance. It was noted that there are lots of different kinds of resistance other than overt action. People could protest over food, over using English in meetings - "There are lots of different kinds of protest. It takes different kinds of forms. To say that there was no kind of resistance like the '60s is not correct."

"What is never discussed is the many controls that were in existence in the camps over internees. Not just the fence and the towers, but internal controls like people spying on people, speaking different languages, community advisers, studies done on people in the camps by academia - all kinds of things that are never discussed. It is part of the experience; it is part of civil rights."

People in the camps tended to associate with others who came from the same geographical area. Generational differences were not as important in forming groups.

Unquestionably there were people in the camps who were supporters of Japan, there were those who were just ticked off at the US, and then there were the super patriots. There were definitely problems in the camps based on these differences. In one case the fact that one young man went to the Army caused so much dissention in the barracks that they had to split the families up. Some were for it, and some were against it. There were real problems like this in the camps.

The visitor has to be made aware of every one of these issues that have been brought up here. You can't just pick one or two things to emphasize; you have to cover all of them.

There were different levels of resistance. There were the Heart Mt. resisters and the Tule Lake "no, no" boys. They aren't in the same category.

"This group obviously has very special and detailed knowledge of the camps - we lived in them. But when you go outside to the general population, you have to go to the basics of what happened. You cannot assume that they know anything at all about what happened. I used to go around to elementary schools, high schools, and colleges in the 70s and talk about the internment and when I gave them the facts and the chronology of what happened they were bored and disinterested. But when they were told stories about personal experiences, like how we had to wash, use the bathroom, eat, and similar stories from real life, they became very interested - they were mesmerized. I used to go out and make presentations about the constitution many years ago and I can tell you the students were not interested in this subject. They fall asleep! I agree that this subject has to be part of the exhibit but you will hit them the hardest by telling them personal stories. You don't need a thousand of them but you need to reach them from the heart. Then they can go on from there to learn more."

(The above statement was followed by a long recitation about the Smithsonian traveling exhibit on the relocation experience and the impact it had on its visitors. This person accompanied the exhibit to many of its sites and was surprised by how little people knew about what happened but also by how shocked they were when they found out. He feels that the Manzanar exhibition can have the same impact if it sticks to the basics as the previous person emphasized.)

Does the exhibit have to be permanent or can you make changes in it as time goes on? Is it possible to have copies of the questionnaire that caused so much trouble in the camps available to visitors to take with them? Or even have them fill them out (in a kind of role play experience?). "How were they expected to give up their citizenship to Japan when many of them could not get US citizenship?"

Can you have a series of lectures or discussions by former internees that cover different topics to supplement the permanent exhibit? Just 5 or 10 minutes about different topics to "wrap around" the permanent things in the exhibit would be good.

The exhibit has to appeal to both the casual "drop-in" visitor who may not have much time to spend and the more serious visitor who wants to learn more. Also, there will be school-based visitors who have a more serious purpose to their visit.

To make sure we reach the "rednecks" that are sure to come to the exhibit, we must emphasize the fact that there were over 30,000 Japanese who served in the Armed Forces in WWII, and 16,000 went overseas. This military story must be told in order to reach those who may not be sympathetic to our story.

Community Leaders

The individuals in this group represent those who have played leadership roles in promoting the wider dissemination and understanding of the Japanese American, WWII, internment story. Several of them also spent time in the internment camps. Their community affiliations are noted below:

Member of the congressionally appointed Manzanar Advisory Commission.
President, Japanese American Historical Society of Southern CA.
Former Southern CA Chair, National Coalition for Civil Rights and Redress.

Former Principal, and Board of Education member for the LA Unified School District.
Member of Japanese American Historical Society of Southern CA.
Retired High School counselor in the LA Unified School District.

It is important that the Manzanar site contain key elements of the way it was when it was an operational camp. At least one block of buildings with the mess hall, etc, should be reconstructed to give the visitor a sense of what it was like originally. The group seemed to agree that the more realistic the site looks, the more effective the visit will be in communicating "life in the camp". It was also noted that the level of funding available might make this difficult to carry out to the extent desired.

This point was further emphasized by noting that one cannot really appreciate what it was like to use the toilets unless one could actually see how they were built. The visual impact of the story is critical to get across.

One of the root causes of the decision to send us to camps was prejudice generated by the war. The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor the person I walked to school with called me a dirty Jap.

We do have a consensus based on the Presidential Study Commission that looked at this question. Racism, war hysteria, and greed were noted as the three root causes. You can't say that the war was the primary cause because there were previous efforts to take land away from Japanese farmers before the war. They may not have been sent to camps, but the war provided the excuse to take that next step. Racism was there long before the war. The fourth element that some want to add to the list is the failure of political leadership.

The role of the media should be noted as well. Even today people think that whatever they read or see on TV is the truth. Examples from the media of that time would be important to show.

The Presidential Commission would be a good place to start. It is a fact of history; it is official. Also, how this all connects to the present should be presented (but maybe not too much on this) .

There should be a connection made to the present. The Lee thing is a good example. He was held in solitary confinement for 9 months against his constitutional rights. In this case the hysteria has to do with the Chinese stealing our military secrets.

There are a lot of connections we could draw between then and now. Politicians get on the bandwagon - they let us down then and they still do when they see a political advantage to it. (The fact that Hoover at the time was against the internment of all Japanese on the coast because he had already identified and picked up the "saboteurs" got quite a few "head nods" from the group as a point that could be included in the exhibit.)

It comes down to what you want to emphasize. There was conflict within the Justice and War departments about the subject - they knew they were wrong but they went ahead and did it anyway. This was a case study of how things could go wrong and then be covered up - like the Watergate scandal.

The constitutional basis for this event ought to be emphasized. You can show point by point how the constitution was violated. The 14th amendment, of course, comes into this picture.

How to make it interesting? Maybe they will pay attention if they see the connection to the Florida vote problem, for example.

Going back to the media issue, it is clear that the media can shape public opinion or even form opinions where there are none to begin with. The media at the time of the war could have been more forceful in showing that the Japanese Americans were loyal, patriotic citizens and not a threat to anyone. Both the radio and newspapers were so powerful at that time. They could have made a difference.

I hope the exhibit is focused at the high school and college age populations. However, they respond more to a discussion of issues rather than being told what to think Make them think and respond rather than being lectured at. The notion among the population at large that one should be loyal to your government "regardless" and not "trash" it must be acknowledged - it is real. The best way to deal with it is to bring it out - even to "plant" ideas that represent negative positions (like "The US should have done what they did to the Japanese because they were our enemies. They bombed Pearl Harbor. Tortured our prisoners") so as to generate a conversation/discussion/argument. That is the only way you can really deal with these kinds of contentious issues and hope to influence opinions in a positive direction.

In terms of what the camps should be called, it was noted that a set position will probably not be taken - let people decide for themselves. Make it a discussion point. There is a debate within the Japanese American community about this. There are many American Jews who are offended by the use of the term "concentration camp".

A long discussion on this topic kept coming back to the need to explore and discuss all the various terms and how they convey different impressions of what really happened. Linguistically "concentration camp" is probably the most accurate term, but it has been contaminated by the Nazis who wanted to cover up what were really death camps. "Relocation camps" sounds like it was done for the benefit of the people who were moved - like they were being saved from a danger (like a flood or a fire) for their own good. The visitor should have the opportunity to make up his or her own mind based on a review of these terms and their denotative and connotative meanings.

State history textbooks now have to include a discussion of the internment experience (11th grade). Some of the texts may have a page and a half, others just a page. It's a state law. Not sure what the camps are called in them. (We should take a look at these entries!)

In terms of Manzanar representing all the camps, there was not a whole lot of difference between it and the other camps. There were more native Japanese at Manzanar so from that point of view there was more tension at that site. Physically the camps were the same.

The fact that there was dissention in some camps (not so much in Manzanar) should be addressed. "We were not getting up every morning singing the Star Spangled Banner." There was internal friction between those who were "Americanized" and those who were not. It was there all the time, but sometimes it came above the surface. Tule Lake had more protesters than the other camps - in that sense they were "different".

A long discussion followed revolving around the balance that needs to be made in the exhibit between how life in the camps was made as pleasant and tolerable as possible while at the same time pointing out the real hardships they lived under (no running water in the barracks, no toilet, no cooking, one small stove for heat which was totally inadequate, very little privacy). Yet there were dances, ball games, parties, and lots of other community activities. Everyone in the group agreed that the visitor must see both sides of the picture. Perhaps "making the best of a bad situation" sums up the point that needs to be communicated to visitors.

There is, of course, the larger philosophical/political issue of how the experience had an impact on an individual's attitude toward the US. There were some who wanted to return to Japan after the war because of their treatment. They no longer felt a loyalty to the US. Others wanted to try to make a life for themselves and try to return to "normal" as soon as possible. The point is there are as many "stories" as there are internees, each one personal and unique.

A major source of dissention within families often revolved around the question of military service. Many of the young people wanted to join but their parents were often very much opposed to this. The military story has to be a part of the exhibit. The loyalty oath questionnaire created major problems for lots of internees, especially non-US citizens. All the "no-nos" were sent to Tule Lake! This topic needs to be addressed in the exhibit.

There were 3000 internees in Tule Lake who did not sign the oath who were therefore not subject to the draft. Signing the oath was not required, but most of us did not know that at the time. We found out years later that we did not have to sign it, but most Japanese were so compliant that they thought they had to and did..

Some of those who left the camps were sponsored by Japanese farmers living in the mid-west. It's interesting that one group could be loyal and the other not, but both were Japanese. "You are dangerous but not that dangerous."

The situation in Hawaii must be covered in the exhibit. "You can't get away from it." Thirty percent of the population was Japanese. If they were sent to camps the economy would have come to halt. About 2500 were picked up and some were sent to Tule Lake. They were in a separate block. "They did not get along well with the rest of us."

It always puzzled me that they put up the Manzanar camp near the source of the water supply for LA. If we were saboteurs that would be the wrong place to put us.

There were actually three relocation stories related to the site at Manzanar. The indigenous people were thrown off the land by the White ranchers, then LA claimed water rights and took over the land and the ranch town, and then Manzanar. The Advisory Commission debated about this and the feeling was that from an historical perspective this material must be covered. The focus has to be on the wartime experience, of course, but we cannot neglect these other stories. We have to deal with it.

There are still remains of the original water system and the pear orchids that were there before. That is one reason Manzanar was picked for use as a representative site - it has these elements that can be made part of the visitor experience. It is well preserved compared to the other sites. Still making archeological "finds" on the site.

The reparations issue was brought up to get some notion of how important it would be to cover. Several comments made a strong case for making this a part of the story. It is related as well to the various court decisions that finally led up to an official apology from the US government and the actual monetary payment to those still alive. "If it were not for the effort made to get these things done, we would not be here today."

Another point was made about the importance of having an educational package to go along with the exhibit. Teachers need to have materials that can help them and their students prepare for a site visit as well as give them post-visit discussion points.

A plea was made for the exhibit to be comprehensive in its coverage of the whole story rather than try to be selective. Even knowing that not all visitors will take the time to see it all, the fact that it is there and they can come back, is very important.

The exhibit should present a variety of views and perspectives. No matter what, there is going to be controversy about something - what is said or how it is said. We should be "up front" about this and be as open as possible.

The Manzanar Advisory Commission will get to review and APPROVE every part of the exhibit during its entire development. "If we don't approve it, it doesn't happen."

Casual Visitors

Eight persons, 6 male and 2 female, volunteered to participate in this Focus Group. Six were recruited from among those persons who happened to be visiting the Japanese American National Museum during the time scheduled for the Focus Group session; two of them were museum docents, both of whom were former internees at the Manzanar camp. Not surprisingly, their comments tended to parallel those made by the Community Leader and Former Internee groups. For this reason the findings reported here more appropriately emphasize and reflect those comments made by the 6 casual museum visitors.

The importance of telling "real stories" was noted by a young lady (21). As a recent student she felt strongly that young people do not go to museums to get a history lesson. "History is not a favorite subject."

Also, the stories told should not be composite ones made up of several real stories. (This comment came from a young, female, 4th grade teacher who remembered an exhibit at the Holocaust National Memorial

Museum in Washington, DC, that depicts the "life" of a young boy and his family in Nazi Germany during WWII.)

The question as to what the camps should be called led to an extended discussion that finally came down to the point that the important message for the exhibition is what happened to those who were sent to the camps, not what the camps were called. The group of 6 was very comfortable with the notion that visitors be given the various names used and the pros and cons for their use and "allowed" to choose the one they feel most closely fits their own feelings. They thought in general that a voting scheme of some kind, where the opinions of previous visitors would be tallied and could be compared with their own, was worth considering. The two former internees were in basic agreement with this idea.

A gentleman who looked to be in his 40s made a statement that initiated a long and at times heated discussion. He worked for the military as a civilian and was previously in the Navy. He thought that while what the US did to the Japanese Americans was probably not right, he was not ready to condemn the action completely. His point was that there were extenuating circumstances that only those who were close to the situation could be in a position to fully understand. Most of the other members of the group tried to convince him that what was done had no possible justification, but none of their arguments were able to "move" this person from his basic position. (It is interesting to note that the two members of the group that one might expect would be most likely to participate in this discussion - the two Japanese who were former internees - were silent the whole time. It might be that they saw that their position was being well represented by the other members of the group, or that, as docents they felt it was not appropriate to take issue with the expressed beliefs of a visitor no matter how much they disagreed with it. The person who was most vehement and articulate in opposition to the "no fault" gentleman was the 4th grade teacher, who based her argument mostly on constitutional and civil rights issues. She also believed that the internment subject should be introduced into the curriculum and textbooks in the early grades as a springboard for classroom discussions on these important subjects.)

The fact that the exhibition will be located at an actual camp site was seen by several members of the group as an important asset. They felt that many people who may have limited time for a visit would opt for a tour of the grounds rather than spend time in the exhibit itself. "Visitors should be able to get the main ideas from the exhibit quickly without having to read and look at everything." They also agreed that a film presentation giving an overview/summary is a good idea but must be "short" (ten minutes max.).

Most agreed that it would be important to relate the "lesson" of the exhibit to the present day so that "we don't do it again." Needless to say, the person who took exception to the notion that what was done was completely wrong, did not agree with this point. He thought that it would be possible that such strong action might be needed again under the "right circumstances". Efforts to get ideas related to how to relate the past to the present did not generate any concrete suggestions.

Toward the end of the session, one gentleman who had not participated in any of the discussions up to that point was asked if he wanted to say anything. He said that he lived in Japan during the war and that his house was bombed by B-29s! He is now a US citizen and agrees that it is important that the internment story and its long-term implications be told. However, he did not wish to offer any additional comments or suggestions. His daughter was with him, who was the person making the earlier remarks about staying away from "history lessons" in the proposed exhibition.

Several comments made by the two Japanese American docents during the session are worth noting:

- The exhibition should make clear the tremendous economic loss that was incurred by the families who were sent to the camps. Not only were they deprived of productive income from their "bread winner" during their time of incarceration, but those who owned businesses lost them completely and had to start over if they could. Even the money that they had in bank accounts when they were sent away was returned at only 10 cents to the dollar when they were released. (True? This seems like a completely illegal act and, if true, should be given prominence somewhere in the exhibition!)
- The three "root causes" of the internment decree need to be emphasized in the exhibition. The one that is often neglected is the one related to economic exploitation. The Japanese were "too successful" as farmers, fishermen and small tradesmen and ways of "getting rid of them" were eagerly sought. The internment issue was seen as a way of accomplishing this in the name of being good, patriotic Americans!! Of course, prejudice and war hysteria played into this as well.
- The generational differences within the camps need to be given special attention. This was the source of many of the difficulties and conflicts that arose both within families and between them. A closely related "sore point" had to do with service in the military and the loyalty oath that internees were asked to complete.

Student Groups

Students from a large Los Angeles inner-city High School participated in two Focus Group sessions. While the request was for 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students, one of mixed gender and ethnicity and the other of mixed gender and Japanese ancestry, the school was able to provide only students from the 10th, 11th and 12th grades and, with one exception, all African-American and mixed gender. One student of Japanese ancestry was in the second group.

It should be noted that WWII history is part of the 11th grade curriculum and includes lessons related to the Japanese American internment experience. It was also the case that the students who participated in these Focus Groups were given an introductory talk by a teacher that led them to believe that they were going to be given a "lecture" by a Japanese former internee from the Manzanar camp! Thus, it could be said that the results obtained from these sessions are to some unknown extent distorted or skewed from those that were originally intended. Nevertheless, the comments made by many of these students are important and need to be taken into account in the exhibit planning process.

Because the two groups were essentially the same in their gender, ethnic, and grade level makeup, the following comments represent those made by both groups (N=28).

Only a few of the students had heard about the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII before they were briefed about coming to the Focus Group. They said this subject was briefly noted in connection with their lessons on US history and WWII.

When asked what kinds of museum experiences they have had and which ones they like the most, several noted that exhibits that you can interact with are the best. Ones where all you do is "look" are not given much attention.

When asked whether they go to museums to learn or to be entertained and have fun, three students said "We don't go to museum!" The group as a whole seemed to share that observation.

The way to make the exhibit experience interesting for young people is to concentrate on how it was to live in a place like that. Show real things and real experiences. Otherwise it will be boring just to see exhibits.

The reason the government made them move was because they were afraid that the Japanese were spies and there was a war against us by the Japanese.

At this point one female student argued in favor of the actions taken against the Japanese. "I really believe it deserved to happen. If Americans were living in Japan and the US declared war on Japan and bombed them like they did us, they would be put in camps and hold us as hostages too. But I didn't live in that time and wasn't in charge of stuff and maybe they should have done it differently, but ..."

The Japanese put Americans in camps. Their treatment of US soldiers was brutal.

In thinking about whether such a thing could happen again, one student mentioned the vote problem in Florida as an example of denying people's civil rights. It was like saying some people in America have no voice. The key word in the internment issue is "Americans". They were Americans not just Japanese. "I think it could happen again!"

A similar thing happened to the Jews.

The exhibit should stress this point - that it not only could happen again, but it is happening all over the world right now.

The phrase "concentration camp" was most closely associated with the Jewish Holocaust of WWII to most of the students. "I don't think it's fair to call them concentration camps like the Jewish camps."

"Did the Japanese feel bad about being in the camps?" "Did any of them refuse to go?" "I would have killed someone."

"I don't think this "park" you are talking about would not be of interest to anyone but young children. Nobody else would show much interest in it." (It sounded like this person said "amusement park",)

"I really have to object to that comment. I would really be interested in it - to learn how the government can affect people's lives. I think it should be called a relocation camp. It was not a positive experience but they made the best out of it."

"What happened to their houses?" There were lots of follow-up questions about what was left of their original possessions when they were released, what they were given, and in general what they had to rebuild their lives all over again. (Interestingly, the boys showed much more interest in this area than the girls.)

"I heard on the news one time that the American soldiers who were at the camps used to rape the Japanese American women in the camps."

An extended dialogue was initiated in the second Focus Group between the young lady who had initially expressed reservations about being critical of the actions taken by the US government, and many of the other members of that group. The following is a verbatim recreation of this important exchange:

(Young lady) "So, if we go to see this exhibit and see how they were treated are we supposed to feel bad about the Japanese and every time we see someone who is Japanese are we supposed to feel sorry for them? And what about the countries that did bad things to Americans? They aren't apologizing to us."

(Group) "We have our own unique constitution and this happened within our society and our own government. And that is what makes it so bad." "And our constitution says everyone can live freely."

(Young lady) "But what if someone in the camp was a spy and would have done something bad against the US? And what if something like this happens again and we don't do something about it?"

(Group) "What if someone stops you just because you are Black, or a police officer kills you just because you are Black? You don't think that is right do you?"

(Young lady) "No, but they had a purpose for doing it. They were trying to protect the US. They gave them food, they gave them shelter. This is something we had to do."

(Group) "If we got into a war with an African country, then according to you, we could put all black people in camps."

(Young lady) "We put them in a safe place where nobody can harm them. There was a lot of anti-Japanese hatred. If I was a US spy and I went to Japan during a war and was caught I would expect to be put in a prison or camp."

All those who agreed with the young lady's point of view were asked to raise their hands. There were no hands showing and several very negative (even hostile) remarks were heard to be made about her position. However, as a parting shot and with head held high, she offered the opinion that if we went out into the larger community we would find many who would agree with her. We can only wonder to what extent she may be right!

SUMMARY

As noted earlier, it is considered important in documenting the results of Focus Group sessions to "capture" all the comments made by participants so that those with a "need to know" can judge for themselves the extent to which they may be of value. It is therefore highly recommended that the individual reports from each of the groups be carefully scanned. However, it is also the case that certain general themes and ideas emerge from these individual discussions. They also need to be documented.

There are two very strong and compelling "meta messages" that come through from the sum total of the comments made by the Focus Group participants. One is the basic, dramatic, human life nature of the internment experience. As the individuals who manage our major television networks have discovered, "real" people in "real" and potentially life-altering situations command the attention of a large segment of the TV-watching public (e.g., "Survivors"). The internment story is about real people in real life-altering situations (no quotes needed)! Even those who initially knew the least about the events surrounding the internment experience (represented primarily by the High School students and a few of the casual visitors), were obviously intrigued by, and interested in, these events and their impact on the lives of internees. Actually, the internment "story" is really an almost infinite number of individual, personal stories, with their own drama - each one different yet each one adding to the overall texture of the experience like a patchwork quilt.

The second "meta message" represents more of a challenge and has to do with the difficulty most students and casual visitors had in articulating the larger meanings that are embedded in the events themselves. In short, getting most visitors to the exhibition to feel compassion and sympathy for the internees will not be difficult, based on the reactions of the vast majority of those in the student and casual visitor groups ("That was a really awful thing to have to go through, leaving everything behind in a moments notice, living in a little room in a barracks building with no water, no bathroom, little heat," etc., etc.). But getting across how it was **allowed** to happen and what **implications** it has for our democratic institutions and values today, will not be so easy to convey. This is a special challenge for potential visitors from the younger age groups (a primary "target audience" for the exhibition) who do not see history in general as an interesting subject, not to mention something as "off the wall" as constitutional history! And yet, it is precisely this larger "legacy" message that the community leaders and the former internees felt was the **most important** to convey. Perhaps this distinction can be thought of best in terms of how visitors would respond to questions about the "what" of the exhibition as contrasted to the "why" of the exhibition.

This distinction parallels two of the three Optional Approaches that are described in the Schematic Proposal prepared by the exhibit development team (Dec. 2000). One is identified as *Chronological* and the other as *Thematic*. As noted, the results of this Front End study strongly support the Chronological or "time line" approach as having the most immediate appeal to the casual visitor, yet it is the Thematic or values approach that carries the real message that must be conveyed if the visitor experience is going to be meaningful beyond a relatively superficial level. As noted in the Schematic Proposal, a "mix and match" approach may be the most effective, where the time/story line is "interrupted" and augmented by the appropriate insertion of messages related to the way "fundamental values came into conflict" at various points. Key elements in this regard would include the root causes behind the internment action, the-key decisions made in carrying out the internment (reinforced by displays of some of the key documents), value conflicts within the camps (e.g., generational differences, military service, loyalty oaths, overt resistance), the treatment of internees at the time of their release (what they were given to "start over") and, finally, the court decisions, apology and repatriations that were a part of the long-term sequel to the entire episode.

To make this approach workable, every effort should be made to "humanize" the thematic material. The use of real-world examples would be important, especially in making that part of the message relevant to current times - the all-important *"Can it happen again?" "Has it happened?"* and *"What can we do to prevent it happening again?"* kinds of questions. Note that the younger members of the groups were clear about what they liked and did not like about exhibits - they like interactive devices that they can manipulate and "play" with and they do not like "history lessons" (translation - they do not like to read long, textbook-like labels!). Ways that the more thematic material could be "married" to interactive kinds of displays would go a long way toward getting the attention and participation of this critical part of the target audience. For example, a computer-based game could raise questions like those above and ask for their own opinion. Tallies from previous users could be shown for comparison purposes, perhaps along with the pros and cons of the various answers. Such a device could also be used to get "votes" on what the camps should be called (a subject that generated a lot of discussion in each group!), along with tallies and various arguments for and against each one,

Speaking of "for and against", it should be remembered that there will without doubt be a relatively small but not-insignificant number of visitors who will take exception to the position that the US was wrong in its internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. There were two Focus Group participants (one Black female HS student and one white ex-military man in his 30s or 40s) who spoke out clearly and forcibly that there were strong if not compelling reasons why the action taken by the US was understandable if not completely justified (the war in general, and the attack on Pearl Harbor in particular, coming up quite often in these discussions). If we exclude all those in the groups who were Japanese American, we have 6% of the remaining participants who, in the face of a vocally "unsympathetic" audience, continued to argue their contrarian point of view. (The young lady was still expressing her feelings as the group was leaving the room!)

While such a small sample obviously precludes generalizing to the population at large, it would be a mistake not to acknowledge that there are those who take such a position. Perhaps the exhibition itself could make this acknowledgement when it talks about values such as freedom of thought and speech. Even the Japanese community itself is not "of one mind" when it comes to their own interpretation of the events and their legacy (the demonstrations by **Japanese** protesters at the dedication of the Japanese internment monument in Washington, DC is a case in point). It is a well-established principle in the psychological study of attitudes and beliefs that the best way to change/influence them in a particular direction is to acknowledge not only the existence, but even the "logic", of the opposing points of view. It is **not** an effective strategy to disregard or, worse, belittle those who hold opposing beliefs, feelings, and attitudes (The Enola Gay experience at the Smithsonian provides a real-world, albeit extreme, example of what can happen when this principle is ignored!)

It would probably be in connection with a discussion of "root causes" that some recognition could be given to the legitimate nature of the fear that was felt, especially at the beginning of the war, and how this "fueled" the other two "causes," prejudice against the Japanese and economic greed. This "story" could be made even more interesting and provocative by including the "Hawaii" experience in the narrative. And, if this whole "package" could be embedded in some kind of an interactive, computer-based program or "game", it may actually get visitors young and old to think more seriously about "values" in connection with the whole internment issue.

The Schematic Proposal lists a set of 10 objectives that the proposed exhibition will strive to meet. It is worth considering these statements in the light of the Focus Group results. (See page 17 for a list of these objectives.)

1. Along with the last objective, this represents the message **whose attainment** will have the most enduring value to visitors. This is strongly reflected in the comments made by those Focus Group participants who should know - those who were sent to camps! As discussed above, it is also the message that will be most difficult to communicate, especially to the younger age groups, since it tends to be thematic rather than chronological, and "mental" rather than visual. Historically, and based on a large number of visitor studies, exhibits have been less successful in communicating big ideas and concepts than they have in communicating specific information about real things. This is even more true when these ideas can be interpreted as being critical of our own society and government and the core values they say they espouse. Nevertheless, the "seeds" that led to the forced relocation and imprisonment of thousands of Japanese Americans during WWII still exist in our society and in the world at large. This fundamental idea should be considered to be the "leitmotif" of the entire exhibition.

2. The first half of this objective is certainly true as made abundantly clear by the "endless" and fascinating stories that the former internees tell at the slightest provocation! The last part of this statement weaves in the root cause notion, as has been discussed above. It is clear from the results of the casual visitor and student groups that the stories qua stories will get their undivided attention (if told with visual dramatic support, of course). Connecting those stories to "prejudice and the betrayal of the American ideal" will, as noted, be the central challenge of the exhibition.

3. Support for this objective has been alluded to in the earlier discussion. It should be considered as an extension and amplification (even a "foil") for messages related to the first and last objectives. Opportunities for using text in the exhibition that asks important and provocative questions should be sought after. **"Why...?"** and **"How Come...?"** in bold and catchy-looking formats get peoples attention, and often convey important points that are often embedded (and lost) in the overkill of verbiage that one finds in so many exhibits. This Hawaiian subject would seem to lend itself very nicely to this kind of treatment.

4, 5, 6. Objective #4, and the two following it, are at the heart of the basic human drama of the exhibition, Real people having real life experiences, good, bad and everything in-between, are at the core of these objectives. It should be noted that the military service subject was given special prominence by both the community leader group and the former internee group. Also included within these objectives are the resistance movements within Manzanar, along with the more positive and patriotic aspects of life in the camp. Generational differences also played a crucial role in the human drama that unfolded within the camps. Note also that this objective will be supplemented in a forceful and dramatic fashion by the experience most visitors will hopefully have in making an actual tour of the Manzanar site.

7. When this subject was raised in both the community leader and former internee groups, there was only one comment (from a prominent community leader!) that supported its inclusion in the exhibition ("In the interest in telling the whole story, this must be included."). This subject does raise some interesting possibilities in connection with the much larger issue of "who owns the land" and how US history shows many examples of a callous disregard for the rights of others when its own interests are compromised or threatened. Actually, someone in the community leader group made a comment that makes the relocation to Manzanar seem almost comic - "Why would the US government put all these saboteurs in a place that is directly over the main water supply for the city of Los Angeles"? These kinds of "off the wall" or tangential comments and statements, by the way, have often been shown to be more effective in communicating "higher level" concepts and ideas than more reasoned and scholarly statements (visitor translation, "long and boring"). In fact, as a general principle, it would be well to look for opportunities to inject humor or irony into the exhibit content wherever it can be done

8. This objective represents the end, and, in many ways, the climax, of the story being told, and, as such, is a critical subject to convey both factually (**what** happened) and thematically (the **significance** of what happened). All focus groups agreed that without understanding the legacy of the internment experience itself, the basic point of the whole story is lost. Unfortunately, this part of the story traditionally lends itself to be presented in a dry, pedantic, and even legalistic, manner. But if we believe what the younger members of our groups had to say about what it is that gets and holds their attention (and probably most adults as well) that would be a serious mistake. The real challenge here will be to find ways to make this part of the story visually and intellectually exciting and dramatic. The first chapter of the story has interesting pictures of people being moved, boarding trains, "Jap" signs, etc., etc., and the middle chapter has the exhibit design elements and objects as well as the site itself. But this last chapter has little to show that has comparable dramatic impact. Actually, this kind of subject matter may be most effectively conveyed to visitors by means of the film that is to be a part of the overall visitor experience (e.g., court scenes, interviews with former internees about how they recovered from the experience, scenes of Japanese American business communities and neighborhoods), all lend themselves very well to the film medium.

9. While "compel" is an unusually strong word to use in a statement of exhibit impact on visitors, this objective will no doubt be met in a "compelling" fashion within the context of several of the previous objectives, assuming that they will be realized in a dramatic, "slice-of-life" manner. The site tour should also contribute significantly to this gut-feeling sense of being "cut off from the rest of the world against your will". The "what to call it" issue has been previously addressed.

10. This last objective was discussed at some length earlier. Perhaps a stronger statement for this crucial point would be to "impart an **understanding**" rather than just "awareness".

Objectives

1. To provide an understanding of the root causes of the forced relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II, revealing how fear and prejudice led to the wholesale violation of their constitutional rights by individuals, communities and the government.
2. To show how the story of Japanese internment was at its heart, a vast collection of highly individual stories, its effects and consequences varying greatly from person to person, inter-connected by prejudice and the betrayal of the American Ideal.
3. To explain how and why the Japanese Americans in Hawaii were treated far differently from those on the mainland.
4. To depict life in camp, showing how the internees were forced to adapt to its harsh circumstances and how they responded by modifying the camp to re-establish and maintain a sensibility of pre-camp life.
5. To identify and depict the various communities within camp, from the early arriving Bainbridge and Terminal Islanders, to the orphanage and hospital.
6. To portray the patriotism and individual heroism of the internees, both in military service and in providing a productive labor force on the home front.
7. To trace the history of displaced populations at Manzanar, from the Native Americans to the pioneer communities, the appropriation of water rights by city of Los Angeles and the Japanese relocation.
8. To show how the Japanese community reestablished itself after World War II and worked to gain redress from the country it was always loyal to.
9. To compel visitors to contemplate their own feelings of the Manzanar experience, what it's like to be forcibly displaced against your will, removed from all your possessions and placed in a guarded, barb-wire camp. Is it a concentration camp? Is it an internment camp? Is it a prison? Is it a relocation camp?
10. To impart a sense of awareness of how this kind subjugation of a minority population can only re-occur if we allow it.

Several concluding thoughts:

- While the exhibition is going to be at Manzanar and about Manzanar, it will also be representing to a significant extent all 10 camps and all 120,000 internees. This relationship needs to be made explicit, so that the visitor can make the appropriate distinctions between what may be unique to or special about the Manzanar experience and what could be considered typical of camps in general. The place to do this is in the orientation/introductory area to the exhibition and in the planned film presentation. While it may be true that many of the other sites will some day be made into visitor centers, one must assume that Manzanar will be the only site visitors have seen or will see. A separate objective should be added to the above list that deals explicitly with this need to give visitors a "big picture" vs. "little picture" understanding before they attend the main part of the exhibition.
- As the development work progresses, the need to refine, add to, or eliminate objectives should be recognized. The discussion above, for example, notes several places where there are similar messages embedded within several objectives. Some consolidation and refinement would help to sharpen these statements and help to keep exhibit content focused on what is most important. In a subject as big as this one, the temptation to wander about is hard to resist. Well-stated and agreed upon objectives are the best means of keeping the exhibit itself "on target" (not to *mention* the visitor!).